



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

City Council School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee

Meeting Minutes

Monday, September 15, 2025

6:00 PM

This meeting was held virtually via Zoom and was called to order at 6:02 pm by Chair Clingan and adjourned at 8:32 pm with a roll call vote of 3 in favor (Councilors Sait, Davis and Clingan), none opposed, and none absent.

Others present: Commissioner Jill Lathan - Department of Public Works, Director Rich Raiche - Infrastructure and Asset Management, Laura Pitone - Somerville Public Schools Personnel, Leiran Biton - School Committee Chair, Dr. Sarah Phillips - School Committee Member, Chief of Staff Nikki Spencer, Chief of Staff Amara Anosike, Matthew Bennett - Building Superintendent, Yasmine Raddassi - Legislative Liaison, Yani Tsirigotis - Director of Operations, Ralph Henry - Director of Capital Projects, Bill Fisher - Director of Emergency Management and Delaney Fisher-Cassiol - Clerk of Committees

Roll Call

Present: Ward Four City Councilor Jesse Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Naima Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Lance L. Davis

1. Committee Minutes (ID # [25-1136](#)) Approval of the Minutes of the School Building Facilities and Maintenance Special Committee Joint Meeting of June 10, 2025.

RESULT: **ACCEPTED**

AYE: Ward Four City Councilor Clingan, Ward Five City Councilor Sait and Ward Six City Councilor Davis

2. Resolution (ID # [25-1231](#)) By Councilor Davis
That the Administration submit to the City Council and School Committee, the city's contingency plan in the event of an emergency school closure during the 2025-2026 school year.

Liaison Yasmine Raddassi emphasized the importance of preventing future building failures and reviewed the administration's five-step plan, as detailed in the attachment SBFM 2025-09-15 Memo (with 25-1231). Chair Clingan stated that he believes the plan is strong and helps put some constituents' minds at ease. School Committee Chair Biton agreed, while noting that some constituents had expressed frustration with the length of time it took to develop the plan.

RESULT: **RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**

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3. Order
(ID # [25-1132](#))
- By Councilor Sait and Councilor Mbah
That the Director of Parks and Recreation report to this Council on the cause of the chemical spill at the Ginny Smithers Pool and the process to address the cause of the spill and prevent a future occurrence.
- This item was taken up with item 25-0727.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
4. Resolution
(ID # [25-0906](#))
- By Councilor Pineda Neufeld
That the Mayor create and make public specific plans that outline the full scope of the work necessary at the Cummings School, including capacity, time, and cost, to host Somerville Public School students in the event of an emergency, and provide regular updates to this Council on such plans until completed.
- This item was taken up with item 25-0234.
- RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE**
5. Resolution
(ID # [25-0729](#))
- By Councilor Davis
That the Administration develop a new process to address ongoing maintenance at the Ginny Smithers Pool and report to this Council to describe that process.
- This item was taken up with item 25-0727.
- RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED**
6. Resolution
(ID # [25-0727](#))
- By Councilor Davis
That the Administration report to this Council on the cause of the reported chemical imbalance at the Ginny Smithers Pool and the process being used to address the imbalance.
- Chief of Staff Nikki Spencer reviewed the attachment SBFM 2025-09-15 Ginny Smithers Pool (with 25-0727, 25-0729, and 25-1132). She explained that the pool will be closed one day a week to allow for necessary adjustments and maintenance. The day of closure is still being determined to minimize disruption, and Director of Operations Yani Tsirigotis is exploring options to expand weekend hours. The memo also outlined updates to the lifeguard manual, including new procedures for testing pool chemicals. Chief of Staff Spencer also addressed the chemical spill in June, caused by human error while refilling a tank of muriatic acid. The Department of Public Works has since installed a shutoff valve on the water hose to reduce the risk of leaks.
- Councilor Sait asked when the weekly closure would begin, how long it would last, and why it was necessary. Chief of Staff Spencer responded that
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it will be implemented before a new director is hired, though plans may change afterward, and noted that other pools have adopted similar practices to allow improvements without interrupting programming. Councilor Davis expressed disappointment about the closure given the pool's importance to the community, but agreed this was the most practical option compared to costlier alternatives.

Councilor Sait also asked about communication with participants whose classes were disrupted. Chief of Staff Spencer said not all participants had been notified but improvements have been made, and she will work with anyone who missed classes to avoid long-term disruptions. She emphasized that chemical balance issues have been ongoing and staff aim to provide timely notifications in the future.

Chair Clingan asked whether staff changes contributed to the issues, whether an outside contractor has always handled maintenance, and when the next deep cleaning is scheduled. Chief of Staff Spencer confirmed there had been some staff departures. Commissioner Jill Lathan stated that a specialized vendor has always managed pool services and that the department will return to an August cleaning schedule.

Chair Clingan also asked if the June chemical spill required emergency management involvement. Director of Emergency Management Bill Fisher confirmed he was notified and present throughout, adding that the response, alerting, and evacuation were effective and that no toxic fumes affected children or others at the pool.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

7. Order
(ID # [25-0234](#))

By Councilor Pineda Neufeld

That the Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management develop a Swing Space plan to accommodate Somerville Public Schools students to mitigate disruption to students, families, and staff while a school building is unavailable or during construction.

Liaison Yasmine Raddassi explained that the School Committee is considering a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in the case of a displacement. This plan will include a long term continuity of operations plan and evaluation of alternative locations. The MOU has not yet been signed off on by the School Committee or City Council.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

8. Resolution
(ID # [24-0466](#))

By Councilor Davis

That the Administration provide the Special Committee on School Building Facilities and Maintenance with regular updates about the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) process for the Winter Hill and Brown Schools.

Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management Rich Raiche reviewed the attachment SBFM - 2025-09-15 Memo (with 24-0466). Councilor Davis asked about the field survey, clarifying that this was the second one. Director Raiche explained that the first survey contained flawed data, but it remains accessible online, while the new survey is stronger and more reliable. Councilor Davis also expressed concerns about the Massachusetts School Building Authority (MSBA) process, noting that combining the two smallest schools into the largest raises educational and community concerns, and emphasized that closing the only school in the ward is something he cannot support. Director Raiche clarified that the Construction Advisory Group (CAG) does not have a formal role in the MSBA process or feasibility study recommendations. Under MSBA rules, the mayor fills three seats on the building committee, and Mayor Ballantyne formed the CAG to inform her decisions.

Chair Clingan raised concerns from the selection committee about whether top firms had experience with passive buildings and whether proposed team members would actually participate. Director Raiche noted that Somerville's contracts include stronger requirements than most, ensuring proposed team members are engaged throughout the project. Chair Clingan also asked about the Saint Anne's School proposal, and Director Raiche said discussions are ongoing but early proposals often differ from the final design.

School Committee Member Laura Pitone asked whether survey responses captured demographics, including residents without children who could still be affected. Director Raiche said the survey remains open to encourage broader participation, with targeted outreach to underrepresented groups. Most responses were from higher-income, long-term homeowners, and demographic data will be included in the final report. Chief of Staff Nikki Spencer added that the City is actively working with the consultant on how to best present the collected data. School Committee Member Dr. Philips asked how the original design will be incorporated into the final work of the selected firm; Director Raiche said it will serve as the starting point.

School Committee Chair Biton raised concerns about Somerville's timeline, noting that other communities completed their eligibility periods faster despite starting around the same time. Director Raiche explained that each project is different, this school is complex, and the CAG has not delayed the process. Councilor Sait asked when financial implications would be shared; Director Raiche said they were presented to the CAG last week and posted

online. He also said he would provide information about outreach to abutters near proposed locations.

RESULT: KEPT IN COMMITTEE

9. Mayor's
Communication
(ID # [25-1333](#))

Conveying an update regarding work completed during Summer 2025 on Somerville Public Schools buildings.

Director of Capital Projects Ralph Henry reviewed the attachment SBFM - 2025-09-15 Updated Presentation (with 25-1333). In response to questions from Councilor Sait, Director Henry explained that project completion is awaiting a final walkthrough to address minor fixes and a Fire Prevention inspection, which he hopes will be done by the end of next week. He also reported that the Kennedy School chiller is operational with some minor piping adjustments still underway, and confirmed that the Winter Hill School is no longer being used for storage. School Committee Chair Biton remarked that the ADA improvements will benefit all residents and are particularly meaningful for individuals with accessibility needs who will now be able to use the same entrance.

Committee Member Laura Pitone asked about the building management system and its use in tracking maintenance. Director Henry shared that similar systems are in place at Somerville High School, the John F. Kennedy School, and the West Branch Library. While the system does not provide predictive data, it tracks alarms and trends that help identify equipment issues. Commissioner Jill Lathan added that the Department of Public Works has been cataloging building systems, and Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management Rich Raiche noted that the City has selected a provider for a citywide asset management program to expand this work.

Building Superintendent Matthew Bennett also reviewed the attachment 2025 DPW School Building Readiness Memo 8.25.25. Chair Clingan asked about cement tiles falling from the East Somerville School. Commissioner Lathan said discussions are ongoing regarding repairs and the cause, while Director Raiche noted the tiles appear to be falling more frequently and are being investigated. Chair Clingan also asked about the former boxing club space and potential environmental concerns; Director Raiche responded there are no updates yet, as the issue was not a summer priority.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED TO BE MARKED WORK COMPLETED

Referenced Documents:

- SBFM 2025-09-15 Memo (with 25-1231)
- SBFM - 2025-09-15 Memo (with 24-0466).pdf
- SBFM - 2025-09-15 Updated Presentation (with 25-1333)
- SBFM 2025-09-15 Lifeguard Manual (with 25-0727 and 25-0729)
- SBFM 2025-09-15 Ginny Smithers Pool (with 25-0727, 25-0729, and 25-1132)

